



House Bill 5560: 25 year levy for public transit in Kent County

The Michigan Environmental Council opposes House Bill 5560 in its current form because it limits access to an important tool in creating effective public transportation throughout the state to only one county. The bill, which amends PA 196 to authorize a local transit authority to levy taxes on real property for public transit purposes for up to 25 years, presents a great opportunity for Michigan citizens to start funding public transit for the long term.

However, House Bill 5560 would allow only the Interurban Transit Partnership serving the greater Grand Rapids area to extend their levy to 25 years. Presumably this would allow them to demonstrate the financial stability needed to secure \$14.4 million in federal money for a fixed guideway transit project. For purposes of clarification MEC is fully in favor of Grand Rapids moving forward with that effort.

However, Southeast Michigan, namely the Ann Arbor – Detroit Corridor is currently going through a planning process that would allow them to access \$100 million for a fixed guideway transit project and they should be afforded the same opportunity to secure financial stability as Kent County. In both cases the federal government is offering money to pay for the engineering of the system and offering to cover up to 80% of the operating costs when the system gets online. To leave that money on the table in these times of financial crisis in Michigan is inexcusable.

Public transit serves an essential functions and purposes in our society. It moves people, not cars to where they need to go. It provides access to jobs, lessens traffic congestion, curbs air and water pollution, helps people lead a more active lifestyle and brings economic development opportunities to those communities that chose to take advantage of it. This legislation could be the first step in allowing citizens to make the choice between auto-dependency and effective public transportation.

MEC hopes that this committee will consider an amendment to House Bill 5560 that strikes the line; “for a public authority located in a county that has a population greater than 500,000 and less than 750,000” and re-opens this opportunity for transit authorities throughout Michigan to plan for the future.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,
Ben Stupka
Land Programs Policy Specialist

